INSIDE THE ST. MIHIEL SALIENT

The Yankees had scarcely finished sorting and swapping their German helmets and other stuff captured between the Marne and the Vesle and packing it off to the folks when they gathered in a whole depot of trophies from the rich regions behind St. Mihiel.

Every doughboy hustling through a village in that salient last week had one eye open for lurking Boches and mines and the other eye, the twinkling eye, open for a souvenir for the girl he's fighting for.

Two privates were jogging through one town on the seat of a ration cart last Friday morning when one of them spied a gray-green, handsomely braided overcoat hanging out to air in front of what had been a German P.C. a few hours before.

"I saw it first," said the large one, sternly. "Now, Buddy, while I keep my hand on these mares, you hike over there and cut off them sleeves for me. I'll bet Eliza Jane can make something pretty doggone nifty out of them."

The other, nothing loath, got out his pen knife and had just hacked off the second sleeve when out of the house swarmed a staff of junior officers. He felt his legs give way beneath him. He knew by their faces what he had done. He had ruined the overcoat which had been tailored and adorned in America to shelter the general commanding the brigade then in possession of the town.

The general was asleep below. His lieutenants, with ill-concealed relish, woke him up so that the show might start at once. The general said several things about the vandalism evidently taught in the rival brigade. He spoke of firing squads, years and year in Fort Leavenworth, pay detained for the duration of the war and so on. Then, after a struggle, he burst out laughing, and that's all there is to that story.

On the eve of such an attack as was launched on the St. Mihiel salient, if you lack any item in your equipment, you must improvise on the spot.

A field hospital was setting up its tents on the top of a hill not far distant from the battlefield when it was discovered that there was no whitewash at hand to paint the giant white cross on the ground which serves to notify the Boche bombers that a hospital is there in operation, the cross which is supposed to protect the hospital, though it has been known to fail. Yet when darkness came, a huge and supremely visible cross lay in the charmed circle. It had been fashioned by stretching out two latrine cloths.

"Our lot has been hard," said the old lady of Thiaucourt when a passing Yankee stopped to give her a drink from his canteen, "but something tells me the lot of the people in Germany has been harder. You should see the German bread, black, heavy, unpalatable bread. Yet the hungry soldier will deny himself half of his so that he may mail some of it home to his folks.

"Think what the want must be in those homes when they have to ask their boys at the front to send them back part of their rations—and such rations."

You may measure the instant success of the attack on the St. Mihiel salient by the fact that by sunset of the third day Jewish soldiers were leaving the line for the observance of Yom Kippur. One of them went off to the celebration in particularly uplifted mood. His "breeches, 1 pr. wool O.D." had been scandalously dirty and, noting that fact, his captain had cheerfully lent him his own very best.

A Slovak butcher, working at some German headquarters in the St. Mihiel salient and blissfully unconscious of impending doom, had breezed into Thiaucourt, where there was the equivalent of a depot quartermaster, to buy him some supplies when he found himself gazing upon three Yankee sharpshooters.

"I was mighty scared at first," he said, "but they had no sooner spoken than I found they were Slovaks, too. You must have all nationalities in your Army. Well, they gave me any orange, they gave me a piece of chocolate, they gave me a cigarette and here I am."

The examining officers at the prisoner pens talk German like natives, but often the prisoners don't and that leads to complications.

One inquisitor, who had just used his best German vocabulary on an uncomprehending Hungarian, turned him over to a special questioner and took on five strangely clad and somewhat bewildered prisoners who, after a great deal of shouting and arm-waving, managed to convey the fact that they were neither Germans nor Austrians nor Hungarians nor Slovaks. They were Italians—five Italians taken prisoner last fall and set to mending roads behind the German lines.

They were much pleased when it slowly dawned on them what had happened, and they wanted to kiss General Pershing or somebody right away.

The Poles and the Alsatians captured are received with extra cordiality at the prison pens, where they are kept apart from the other prisoners. There is a really heart-warming scene when the Alsatian-born Yankee sergeant at one of the pens opens his arms to a brother Alsatian caught in a Yankee dragnet.

One observer at the front on September 12 traversed the roads for six hours. During that time he passed, all told, four wounded Yankees and, in many detachments, about 2,000 German prisoners. This proportion cheered him immensely, and while the ratio was probably not quite so good as all that, his sample of the results was not so very misleading.

Every big American gun has a name of its own, bestowed upon it by the men of the battery. One of the big ones that pounded away at the German communications behind St. Mihiel was named "Wilson's Answer."

You could hear Wilson's answer all over Lorraine.

Of course in every army the telephone stations have odd and frequently changed code names. For example, Parsnips may be Vladivostock tomorrow. It might be a boy's name one day or a flower's name the next.

In one P.C. that played a big part in the St. Mihiel battle, a skilful but rather effeminate young captain had to endure the titters in the dugout whenever he went to the telephone and was there obliged to say:

"Yes, this is Annabelle."

In the woods just west of Thiaucourt, a lieutenant in the Sanitary Corps went out to test the water in a nearby spring. While he was on this job he looked up just in time to see two Boches advancing. Although armed with nothing deadlier than a first aid pouch, he made a motion toward his right hip. Immediately both Boches, catching the motion, lifted their hands in surrender.

Other Boches soon came forward from the woods, and each, coming suddenly upon the officer still making threatening motions toward his pistol-less hip, surrendered in turn.

By the time a sergeant and five Yankee privates came along, the lieutenant had a bag of 19 German prisoners to turn over to them.

As the Americans and French advanced up through the St. Mihiel salient, French detachments followed each regiment into various towns with French signs all ready to supplant the German signs that had adorned buildings and street corners for four years.

So eager were the French to get these signs up that one French officer came near being 30 minutes too soon. He was advancing up the road towards Apremont when, less than a kilometer from the village, he almost stumbled over troops lying in the road, rifles at the shoulder.

"What are you doing here?" asked the officer in charge of the troops.

"I'm on my way to Apremont," replied the Frenchman, "to post these signs."

"Then you'd better wait about 80 minutes until we take it," came the reply. "It's still full of Germans."

"Yet," remarked the Frenchman, "they say we are a deliberate race and never in a hurry."

The proudest Yank in the whole advancing army was one who had an empty truck going forward. On his way up he began picking up refugees along the road, old men, women, children, cradles, baskets. But the proudest moment of his trip came when he saw a little girl, not over four years old, sitting by the side of a road with a wee doll in her arms. The Yank stopped the truck, jumped down and gave the pair, baby and doll, the seat of honor at his left. And from that point on he watched his charge as carefully as he did the jammed and crowded road ahead.

There is one Yankee sergeant who is still uncertain as to whether he gets a wound stripe or not. He had gone forward in the charge against machine gun nests and shrapnel without a mark. Then the time came to halt and dig in. While at this place he attempted to open a can of condensed meat and the same exploded, injuring his right hand.

Quite a number of Germans are not so keen at standing by their machine guns to the death as they used to be. One rear guard machine gun detachment hidden in a woods began firing rapidly. But when the Yanks arrived they found each machine gun pointing directly upward, with German hands extended in the same general direction.

There was one Yank private in Thiaucourt who took a chance, but he couldn't resist the temptation. When his mates first saw him they were uncertain whether he was the Kaiser or the Crown Prince as they rushed forward to make the capture.

For he was riding a German officer's horse, he had on a German officer's helmet and on his chest was pinned the iron cross, all left by German officers in their rush to safety. The Yank squad bent upon making an important capture were a trifle disgusted to find that it was only Private Jones of the Infantry.

Among the spoils of the St. Mihiel salient were many Boche ambulances which supplied striking evidence of the scarcity of rubber in Germany.

The front wheels of the ambulances were equipped with steel tires—an ingenious affair with an outer rim like that of a wagon tire separated from the wheel by steel spiral springs. The rear tires were pneumatic and of rubber like ours, but they were encased in a leather cover to reduce wear.

Some of the ambulances were doing business in the American ambulance service before their engines had been stilled many hours. They are rougher to ride in than ours, harder to steer and much noisier.

There are few braver, more hopeless deeds in the annals of this war than that of one 48-year-old German soldier who, deserted by his comrades and without food and water, stuck to his machine gun post in the tower of a shell-gutted church for three days after the Americans entered and took possession of one little town northeast of St. Mihiel.

The German, with a non-com and another soldier, had been stationed in the tower and told to stick to the last by a lieutenant who immediately left for the north. When the American Artillery got too hot, the non-com and the second private sought shelter in a cellar, and there they were found when the Americans entered the town.

The Boche shelled the same town a few hours after the Americans got through and continued his shelling intermittently during the next three days, but undeterred, the grizzled German stuck to his sniping post.

He fired only when an airplane was in sight overhead, and the spasmodic sputterings of his gun were put down to airplane fire.

Fortunately for the Americans, his post did not command any important points. A headquarters had been established in the shadow of the church tower, but the pitch was too great for him to negotiate with his gun.

At the end of the third day he was seen by a doughboy, who climbed up and captured him. He was feeble from lack of nourishment and thirst, or he might not have surrendered so easily.

"For Germany and the Kaiser," was his explanation as to why he had stuck it out.

"The master ill befits the servant," said the officer who examined him. "Give him a big feed and a package of cigarettes."

The sign painter and poster got busy before the dust had settled in the wake of the Infantry. Sometimes new signs were put up, and sometimes a German sign was merely reversed and the desired American inscription painted upon its back.

There were signs telling which way the roads led—some of them—and signs that the headquarters of the — Engineers was there and the P.C. of the — Division here. But there was one sign, of the rest, that always attracted attention. It was just on the line from which the Americans started their advance. With an arrow pointing vaguely forward it read merely:

"U.S"

In the German army, as in the American, garden patches supplement the food ration. German military gardens in the reclaimed salient, however, were so numerous and of such size that the impression the Americans got was that the German soldiers in this sector depended largely for food upon what they themselves produced and upon what was grown by the French natives forced to work in the fields for three sous an hour.

Our captures include several thousand acres of gardens, and although it is rather late in the season, the pickings will be far from poor for many resourceful mess sergeants.

Residents of the freed towns got a real example of the American soldier's buying power. Stores and shops which had full stocks, enough to last for weeks or months with the desultory buying of the civilian population and the modestly paid German soldiers, were all sold out within two or three hours after the Americans arrived.

The hasty evacuation of certain towns by the Germans resulted in many curious finds by policing, mopping-up and salvage parties. One German brigadier who had departed with more speed than grace had apparently kept a complete file of all orders from German general headquarters and a thorough file of all confidential data and correspondence. An intelligence officer, called to the scene, started to go through it, but the task was too much for him. He shipped all the papers off to headquarters.

The collection exactly filled one Quartermaster's truck.

The main trench of resistance at certain places, at least, around the salient was about as stiff and scientifically enforced a line as most of the doughboys who took it had ever had an opportunity to examine. Behind numerous outer trenches and machine gun and picket posts this main line ran, usually along high ground commanding a sweep of all the space for many yards in front.

It was for the most part about 10 feet deep and four or five feet wide at the top, with steps leading up to machine gun and lookout posts at the top and stairways leading to deep dugouts below. It was reinforced at doubtful points by stone or concrete walls. At points particularly likely to be attacked concrete pill boxes and block houses had been installed.

The communication trenches to the rear were deep and well drained. Signs gave such information as the number of each section, the way to the officers' dugouts, and the way to the company P.C.'s.

But withal this line fell to the Americans with practically no resistance, and the deep gash in the earth was only an incident for the tanks.

The entrances to the dugouts had, in places, been choked up with banked earth, suggesting that possibly the officers had sought to prevent the men in the front line from seeking shelter in them during times of stress.

The Boche left the St. Mihiel salient so abruptly that he didn't have time to destroy the bridges, plant his usual number of booby traps, or render railroads, military and otherwise, temporarily useless, so the work of the Engineers wasn't as varied, on the whole, as it has been in some actions.

But many Engineer detachments distinguished themselves by going over the top with the doughboys for wire-cutting and the like, and some of these remained with the Infantry and romped on to the finish.

In one case two Engineers and an Infantryman pushed down a road, rounded a hill at the edge of a sizeable town, fired upon a quartet of Germans, who hastily departed, and then marched into the town and proclaimed to the joyful, enthusiastic natives that they took the village in the name of President Wilson. They announced that the town would be turned back to the natives as soon as an officer arrived to take charge of the ceremony.

The Engineers were particularly quick in getting some of the Boche rolling stock to rolling again. One unit was operating a German narrow gauge railroad 12 hours after the Boche left it. Little locomotives were running about, their German nameplates effaced, rechristened in chalk.

"Madaline —— Company E, —— Engineers," read the inscription on one. One Engineer sergeant's best girl back in the States had been honored, even if she wasn't there to know about it.

"Can anyody run this" asked an Engineer captain of his company, pointing to one diminutive engine with a flywheel like a threshing machine.

"Sure, I can, sir," said one husky private from his company. "I've fired on 27 railroads, I've been fired from seven, I've worked on every kind of locomotive the Baldwin Works ever thought of, and I can run anything with four wheels that Fritz can build. I'll have this baby talking English in an hour."

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